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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet focuses on cocaine and crack use and the addictive nature of cocaine/crack. It contains a set of 21 questions about crack and cocaine, each accompanied by a clear and complete response. Interspersed throughout the booklet are photographs and quotes from former cocaine or crack users/addicts. Questions and answers focus on what cocaine and crack are, how they affect the body, the dangers of taking cocaine or crack, addiction, and risks other than addiction. Other issues addressed include the effects of crack and cocaine on the heart, on the brain, and on a person's behavior. Other psychological effects are also discussed. Risks run by pregnant women who use crack or cocaine are explored, and the effect of these drugs on unborn babies and nursing infants is examined. The effect of cocaine and crack on sexual pleasure is considered. Other questions focus on how crack and cocaine are used, the purity of street drugs, the cost of crack and cocaine, how crack and cocaine are used in combination with other drugs, symptoms of withdrawal, and treatments for cocaine and crack addiction. (NB)

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Cocaine Crack The Big Lie

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When I was doing cocaine I got so selfish. I wished I didn't have no one — no kids, no parents, no people who love me. I didn't care about nothin' — that's how crazy it was. I just couldn't get enough. You know what? Anyone who tells you cocaine's okay is a liar.

Kenny, an ex-cocaine abuser

I had a beautiful family, a big house in the suburbs, everything I wanted. Then I got into cocaine and I almost lost it all. It's a lie that cocaine's not addictive. I didn't choose to be an addict. Quitting cocaine was the only thing I couldn't do by myself. I'll be a recovering addict day by day for the rest of my life.

William, a former user

Kenny and William, like many people, thought cocaine and crack were safe to use. That's The Big Lie. As Kenny and William and millions of others have discovered, cocaine — snorted as a powder, smoked as crack, or used in any form — is a powerfully addictive drug. It can ruin health, damage careers, and destroy relationships. It can even kill you.

Don't buy The Big Lie. Use these facts to help yourself and others say no to cocaine and crack. If you need more information or a referral to a treatment center, call the National Institute on Drug Abuse's toll free hotline: 1-800-662-HELP.

WHAT IS COCAINE?

Cocaine is a white powder that comes from the leaves of the South American coca plant. Users call it by a variety of names, including coke, C, snow, blow, toot, nose candy, and The Lady. The drug sold on the street is often a mixture of cocaine with other substances, which stretch the supply and increase the

seller's profits. Cocaine belongs to a class of drugs known as stimulants, which tend to give a temporary illusion of limitless power and energy.

WHAT IS CRACK?

Crack is a form of cocaine that has been chemically altered so that it can be smoked. Because the processing converts the cocaine into a chemical "base" (as opposed to an acid or a salt), crack belongs to a category of cocaine known as freebase. In the past, most freebase cocaine was processed using ether, a highly flammable solvent. Today, baking soda and heat are used to convert cocaine into freebase, eliminating the processing step involving ether. The product still contains some impurities found in the original cocaine, along with excess baking soda. When heated, the mixture makes a crackling sound.

Crack looks like small lumps or shavings of soap but has the texture of porcelain. In some parts of the country, the lumps of crack are called "rock" or "readyrock." In other areas, the drug is sold in 3-inch sticks with ridges that are referred to as "french fries" or "teeth." There also are reports that crack is being pressed into pills.

HOW DO COCAINE AND CRACK AFFECT THE BODY?

The immediate effects include dilated pupils and a narrowing of blood vessels. Cocaine and crack also cause increases in blood pressure, heart rate, breathing rate, and body temperature. Users lose their appetites and have trouble sleeping. Those who snort cocaine often have a runny nose. Cocaine and crack initially elevate mood, temporarily filling the user with a sense of exhilaration and well-being. As these effects wear off, however, the user's mind and body slide into a depression that is characterized by a "let down" feeling, dullness, tenseness, and edginess.

IS TAKING COCAINE OR CRACK DANGEROUS?

A very great danger for all cocaine and crack users is addiction. Dependency on cocaine and crack is so strong that these drugs dominate all aspects of an addict's life. Addiction can erode physical and mental health, drain financial resources, drive away family and friends, and destroy careers. Addicts hurt themselves and those around them.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU BECOME ADDICTED?

When exposed to large amounts of cocaine, people dependent on the drug prefer it over all other drives and pleasures. Drug taking continues until the user is exhausted or the cocaine is depleted. People addicted to cocaine can lose control over the drug and their lives, exhibiting behaviors markedly different from their pre-cocaine lifestyles. Serious disruptions within the family, on the job, and in social situations occur. When cocaine becomes an obsession, thought is disorganized, judgment fails, and existence becomes dismal. Many people addicted to cocaine use the drug just to feel "normal," or to avoid the severe depression and fatigue that set in when they try to stop.

I sat in my apartment and turned on the gas.
I was crazy from cocaine. I couldn't live without it.
That wasn't me, it was somebody else. When I saw
cocaine was more important than me, I woke up.
Now I'm slapping myself with reality to stay strong.
I'll be struggling for the rest of my life.

Rose, a recovering addict

IS CRACK MORE ADDICTING THAN OTHER FORMS OF COCAINE?

Cocaine can be addictive no matter how it is used. Even occasional use can lead to an uncontrollable desire for the drug. There is no way to predict who will become dependent. Those who do, like Rose, never guessed they would. Crack is particularly alarming because it produces the most dramatic cocaine high — smoking allows high doses of cocaine to reach the brain almost instantly. This rapid "high" is followed by a profound "low" that leaves the user craving more. As a result, crack can be rapidly addicting.

ARE THERE OTHER RISKS IN TAKING COCAINE OR CRACK?

Addiction is among the most common and devastating problems caused by cocaine and crack. The effects of addiction can linger for a lifetime — relapse to drug use is always a possibility.

Besides addiction, however, cocaine and crack can also cause medical problems. On occasion, even death. In some people, a single dose of cocaine can produce seizures or heart and respiratory failure. The risk of such complications becomes greater for all users as the amount and frequency of drug use increase.

Users who share needles or other paraphernalia to inject cocaine face other potentially life-threatening

risks: These individuals may infect themselves with the organisms that cause hepatitis or acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). In addition, users may pass these organisms on to their sexual partners or unborn babies.

I was totally out of control. I didn't even realize it. That's what's crazy about cocaine. One night, my heart freaked out. I thought I was going to die.

Howard, a former cocaine addict

HOW CAN THE HEART BE AFFECTED?

Cocaine and crack constrict the heart's blood vessels, making it work harder and faster to move blood through the body. In some users, this stress may trigger chest pain or a heart attack. The drugs can also interfere with the signals controlling the heart's pumping action. When this happens, the organ beats so irregularly, it may stop.

Although users with underlying heart problems or blood vessel disease may be most likely to suffer heart attacks or heart failure from cocaine and crack, new evidence suggests the drugs can affect young people with apparently healthy hearts. Cocaine, in all of its commonly used forms including crack, has been associated with sudden heart attacks in people under the age of 30, some of whom had used the drug for the first time.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF COCAINE AND CRACK ON THE BRAIN?

Cocaine and crack can cause brain seizures, a disturbance of the brain's electrical signals, some of which regulate the heart and muscles controlling breathing. Over time, studies in animals have shown, the brain appears to become more and more sensitive to cocaine. As a result, the threshold at which seizures occur is lowered. Repeated use of the drug without experiencing problems does not guarantee freedom from seizures in the future. The next dose — used in the same amount and the same way as always — could produce a seizure that may cause the heart to quit beating or the muscles controlling breathing to stop working.

In addition, some users have suffered strokes after using cocaine — the increase in blood pressure the drug causes may rupture brain blood vessels.

ARE THERE OTHER EFFECTS ON THE BRAIN?

The obsessive, drug-seeking behavior of cocaine and crack users seems to be due to the drugs' overwhelming influence on what has been called the "reward center" in the brain. Cocaine appears to cause an intense stimulation of the center by allowing a brain chemical called dopamine to remain active longer than normal. This causes changes in brain activity and triggers an intense craving for more of the drug. The user may compulsively use cocaine or crack just to feel normal.

CAN COCAINE AND CRACK CHANGE THE WAY A PERSON BEHAVES AND THINKS?

Violent, erratic, or paranoid behavior can sometimes accompany use of these drugs. This "cocaine psychosis," which can occur in all cocaine users, may appear more rapidly in those who smoke crack. Affected users can be anxious, believe they have superhuman powers, or become suspicious and paranoid to the point where they believe that their lives are in danger and react in bizarre or violent ways. Hallucinations are also common. Users may hear or see things that don't exist, or they may experience "coke bugs" — a sensation of imaginary insects crawling over the skin.

WHAT ABOUT OTHER PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS?

Other psychological effects may include profound personality changes, particularly in those who use cocaine or crack daily, or those who subject themselves to periods of uncontrolled use or "binges." These users describe themselves as being "coked out." Their thinking is generally impaired, and they are confused, anxious, or depressed. Short tempers, panic attacks, and suspiciousness frequently characterize relationships with friends, loved ones, and coworkers. The more crack and cocaine users take, the more likely they are to develop psychosis. Continued use of cocaine and crack can bring on a partial or total break with reality.

I stole for cocaine. See, cocaine torments you 'til you'll do anything to get it. You become evil; a real conniver. I'm not that bad a guy. I'm not that low. When you do cocaine you lie to yourself about being in control. I got to the point where my life was going down the drain, and I didn't even care. Anyone tells you cocaine's okay — don't believe it.

Tom, a former cocaine addict

WHAT RISKS DO PREGNANT WOMEN RUN BY USING COCAINE OR CRACK?

Cocaine or crack used during the early months of pregnancy may cause miscarriages or stillbirths. Used later in a pregnancy, the drugs may cause premature labor or premature delivery. Sometimes, when the drug causes the placenta to separate early, the lives of both the mother and baby are in danger due to bleeding and shock.

HOW ARE BABIES AFFECTED?

Babies exposed to cocaine in the womb often don't cuddle or nurse well, and may be generally irritable and unresponsive, making them hard to take care of. Some cocaine-exposed babies have suffered strokes before birth or heart attacks after delivery. Infants born to cocaine-using mothers may have malformed kidneys and genitals and be at increased risk for having seizures or succumbing to crib death (sudden infant death syndrome).

Nursing mothers can pass cocaine to their babies through breast milk. Although the effects of such exposure are as yet unknown, babies fed cocaine-containing milk may be likely to suffer some of the same heart and brain problems as adults.

DO COCAINE AND CRACK IMPROVE CONCENTRATION OR ENHANCE SEXUAL PLEASURE?

These are some of the myths associated with cocaine use. Many people try cocaine because they believe it will increase their concentration and improve their performance. Most find that after the drug wears off — usually within a few minutes — they feel more anxious, tired, and depressed than before.

Cocaine also attracts people because it is reported to enhance sexual pleasure. Although some initial users may increase their sexual activity under the influence of the drug, those who become addicted to cocaine often become unable to function sexually.

HOW ARE COCAINE AND CRACK BEING USED?

Many users buy the powdered cocaine in grams (1/28-ounce) or in fractions of a gram called "quarters" or "eighths." These users often "snort" the drug through the nose. Some inject cocaine into a muscle or a vein. In its freebase form, cocaine is smoked. Traditionally, freebasers bought powdered cocaine and processed the drug with ether themselves. Today — in the form of crack — freebase cocaine also comes pre-processed and ready to smoke. Crack is being mass marketed on the streets in small vials, folding papers, or foil packets usually containing one to four pellets.

IS COCAINE OR CRACK BOUGHT ON THE STREETS PURE?

When users snort or inject cocaine or smoke crack, very rarely is that all they are putting in their bodies. The purity of powdered cocaine obtained by most users ranges widely from 30 to 95 percent, since most is "cut" with other substances by the seller to increase profits. These fillers, or adulterants, include various sugars (mannitol, lactose, and sucrose) that are used to give volume to the product and inexpensive stimulants (such as caffeine, the over-the-counter diet drug phenylpropanolamine, an anti-asthmatic drug called ephedrine, and amphetamines) and anesthetics (procaine, lidocaine, benzocaine) that look like the real thing.

These impurities increase the hazards of taking an already risky drug, because users have no way of knowing how much cocaine they are giving themselves. In addition, some of the added impurities can cause adverse side effects, such as nasal irritation, high blood pressure, nervousness, stomach cramps, diarrhea, and increased heart rate.

Crack is generally more pure than the powdered cocaine from which it is made, but this smokable product still can contain impurities as well as baking soda left over from processing. Like powdered cocaine, the purity of crack ranges from 30 to 95 percent.

HOW MUCH DO COCAINE AND CRACK COST?

In many cities, the price of cocaine has dropped to all time lows while the purity of the drug has increased. A gram of the drug can be purchased for $70 to $100 in some places. Since cocaine can be purchased in even smaller amounts, it can be even less expensive for the beginning user. Crack, the smokable form of cocaine, can be purchased for $5 to $10 per dose. This low price is of national concern because even youngsters can afford to buy the drug.

Some users spend hundreds or thousands of dollars on cocaine and crack each week. The habit can cost whatever money users have to spend — or whatever money they can get by depleting bank accounts or selling their cars, homes, and businesses. As resources evaporate, users are apt to turn to drug selling or other crimes to support their habit. In addition, users pay the additional price of damaged health, career, and personal life.

IS COCAINE OR CRACK USED IN COMBINATION WITH OTHER DRUGS?

Many cocaine and crack users find that they can't sleep and most are unable to shake the severe depression that occurs as the drug wears off. So they turn to other drugs to alleviate these symptoms. All drugs can have adverse consequences, and by combining substances, users may be placing their health or their lives in increased jeopardy.

The drug most commonly used in conjuction with cocaine is alcohol. However, marijuana, barbiturates, and tranquilizers are often taken along with or after cocaine. Another drug often combined with cocaine is heroin: this mixture, called a "speedball," can sometimes be deadly. Recent reports indicate that users may be increasingly combining cocaine or crack with the hallucinogenic drug phencyclidine (PCP), forming a preparation called "space base."

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF WITHDRAWAL ASSOCIATED WITH STOPPING COCAINE OR CRACK?

People who stop taking cocaine or crack become irritable, anxious, and deeply depressed. Often, they are unable to sleep. And, above all else, they have an intense craving for the drug.

ARE THERE TREATMENTS FOR COCAINE AND CRACK ADDICTION?

The long-lasting craving for these drugs makes addiction hard to treat without assistance. But there are many treatment programs throughout the country that can help people get off and stay off cocaine or crack. The first step in treatment is detoxification, ridding the body of the drug. This is sometimes followed by medication, such as antidepressants, to help control the craving and treat the severe depression that occurs after cocaine or crack is withdrawn. Treatment programs also help the recovering user find other alternatives to curb the craving for the drug. Often this help is through a combination of individual, group, and family counseling in addition to other techniques aimed at changing behavior. The goal of recovery programs is to improve self-image and promote healthy living without drugs. Supportive family members or close friends of the person in treatment can often help make recovery a success. Many recovering individuals also

find continuing strength and support in attending meetings of Cocaine Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous, which are self-help groups modeled after the Alcoholics Anonymous program. These groups are listed in the phone book.

There was this guy, a nationally known sports hero. And then I got busted. As a result of my lust for cocaine, I bypassed high and went straight to messed up. Some of you know exactly what I'm talking about because you're taking the exact same ride.

Mercury Morris, football star and ex-cocaine addict

A phone call to the National Institute on Drug Abuse's information and treatment referral hotline could help you or someone you care about get off cocaine or crack. It took prison to help Mercury Morris. Call 1-800-662-HELP.

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